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Pen Pictures of Guerrilla Life in Cuba

By THOMAS C. ESTERMAN.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

The wild and picturesque life of the Cuban struggler for liberty in his native forests and mountains has never been so entertainingly or truthfully set forth as in these sketches by Thomas C. Esterman. The author, who was an American gun-maker, in business in Manzanillo, being fond of adventurous experiences, was easily persuaded to accompany one of the Cuban officers to a camp in the Eastern province to repair an outfit of Mauser rifles, and he was by no means averse to sharing for awhile the fortunes of the Cuban patriots. A keen observer and ready writer, his appreciative and often highly dramatic reproduction of scenes and happenings illustrative of the character of people and country cannot fail to please the reader, be he seeking for knowledge or entertainment. Notwithstanding the much that has been published about Cuba and her people, one needs just such treatment of the subject as Mr. Esterman gives it to realize many phases of their true character.

Serg't Garcia, in charge of our mule-train, came into camp one evening with provisions enough to obviate the risks of "Portuguese fasts" for weeks to come. He told us that at a ford of the Rio Moscon, some 25 miles from camp, his scouts, it seems, brought in news of a running fight between a troop of Spanish rangers and Pacheco's horde of negro bushwhackers, and judging from the echoes of an approaching fusillade, the Sergeant thought it the best plan to turn sharp to the right and pick his way through brook-beds and *ramblas*, till he reached the vantage-ground of a flat-topped hill at a safe distance from the main wagon-road.

Hostile scouts did flit about that road, but the echoes of the manhunt gradually died away. The marauders had scattered, and while the rangers chased one detachment in a westerly direction across the Mayo River Mountains, another turned straight east, and scuttled into some cove among the foothills of the Sierra Vasteca.

That lifted the embargo of Camp Barrancas, and, with Capt. Holgar's permission, next morning we paced off a range for target-practice.

As a rule, the Cuban guerrillas are better hunters than their Spanish rivals; they know the wood-trails and the habits of every bird; but in point of general marksmanship honors are easy. Neither the Spaniard nor his West Indian cousin is by nature a rifle-making biped; their organs of constructiveness are poorly developed, though in destructive penchants and abilities they can emulate our Modoc Indians, that traveled 50 miles through deep sand-drifts for the special purpose of demolishing a little meeting-house.

I have seen recruits change color and falter in approaching a bombshell mortar, and with exactly the same hesitation some of our bushwhackers advanced to the target-stand. All they knew of a Mauser rifle was its pre-eminence as a homicidal contrivance of highly-intricate construction, and recollecting the accounts of Yankee misbelief, they possibly credited me with a scheme to initiate them into the mysteries of black art.

"*No es cosa Christiana*" (that's not done in a Christian way), i. e., not in a natural manner, I heard one of them mutter, and saw his comrades exchange furtive glances, while I was trying to explain the mechanism of an ejector spring.

There were exceptions. Quartermaster Holgar and one of the Sergeants seemed to take a keen interest in mechanical curiosities, but their comments often suggested their inexperience in the management of long-range rifles.

WORK WITH A MAGAZINE GUN.

"Yes, we have practiced at a 300-yard range before," said the Captain; "but beyond that it seems to be a mere game of chance."

"In tanglewoods like those of the foothills?" I inquired.

"No, in open ground, too," said he; "owing to the arrangement of the rifle-sights. Why, what's the use betting on shooting-matches at 1,000 yards, when your aim gets blurred at half that distance? It might be different in Africa, where they have game as big as a boarding-house, but anything smaller than a buffalo bull gets hidden by the front sight at a quarter of a mile. So where's the use?"

I made no reply, cleaned the slandered sights of my favorite Mauser, and soon after began firing at the maximum range.

"What distance would you call that?" asked the Captain, when the marker had reported two second-ring hits and one rim-scraper out of five shots.

"Six-hundred yards, or let's say 550, to allow for the roughness of the ground."

"The devil you say!" shading his eyes to estimate the correctness of my computation; then, after a scrutiny of my rifle-barrel, "how the wonder do you do it?"

"Practice, that's all; or practice and a good cleaning ramrod."

"Yes, but—say, will you oblige me to keep this up a little longer?"

Capt. Holgar took out his note-book and strolled over to the target-pit.

Did he suspect me of collusion with the marker, or did he wish to study the effect of Mauser bullets at that un-Christian distance?

I gave him plenty of time to verify my previous score, and then pegged away again. The non-commissioned officers at my side kept an eye on my manner of loading.

"Yes, that settles it," said Serg't Castro, when the Captain at last retraced his steps. "Five fair hits and a touch out of a total of 12 shots."

"Heavens; what meat we have been losing," muttered Corp'l Gaspar, "by not getting such shooting machines long ago. The runaway cows on the plateau of the Sierra de San Pablo, he informed me, began to get nervous on seeing a stranger get nearer than 400 yards; but 600—yes, that would have turned them all into jerked beef months ago."

A NEW APPOINTMENT.

Some 50 steps from the shooting-stand Capt. Holgar stopped for a whispered conference with one of the Lieutenants, and eyed me sideways so often that I could only hope he would not indict me on a charge of witchcraft, but I found that I had merely been guilty of an indiscretion, and that my black art exploits had saddled me with an appointment as Purveyor's assistant.

"We were wondering if you would sue us for breach of contract," said the Captain; "but Lieut. Salinez has an idea that you might be fond of exercise, and the cook will make it worth your while to put these rifles to a practical test. Our mountain-climber, Lieut. Estevan, is going to take a hunting party to the Sierra Vasteca to-morrow. Would you like to go along and try your luck with moving targets?" In that form the change of program could not well be declined; but I made up my mind not to hit any milch cows, if I could help it.

Lieut. Estevan had been so rarely in camp that this was my first chance to make his personal acquaintance, though he had befriended me more than once, and sent me a package of American newspapers from San Carlos only a week before.

"He has been a little moody ever since the Spaniards shot his brother," said the Captain; "but you will find him a clever fellow in all essentials, and an entertaining talker, if you get him in the right humor. He was in business in Kingston, Jamaica, nearly six years, and could have got a job as an interpreter if he had not got disgusted with that country."

"Interpreter in Kingston? He talks English, then?"

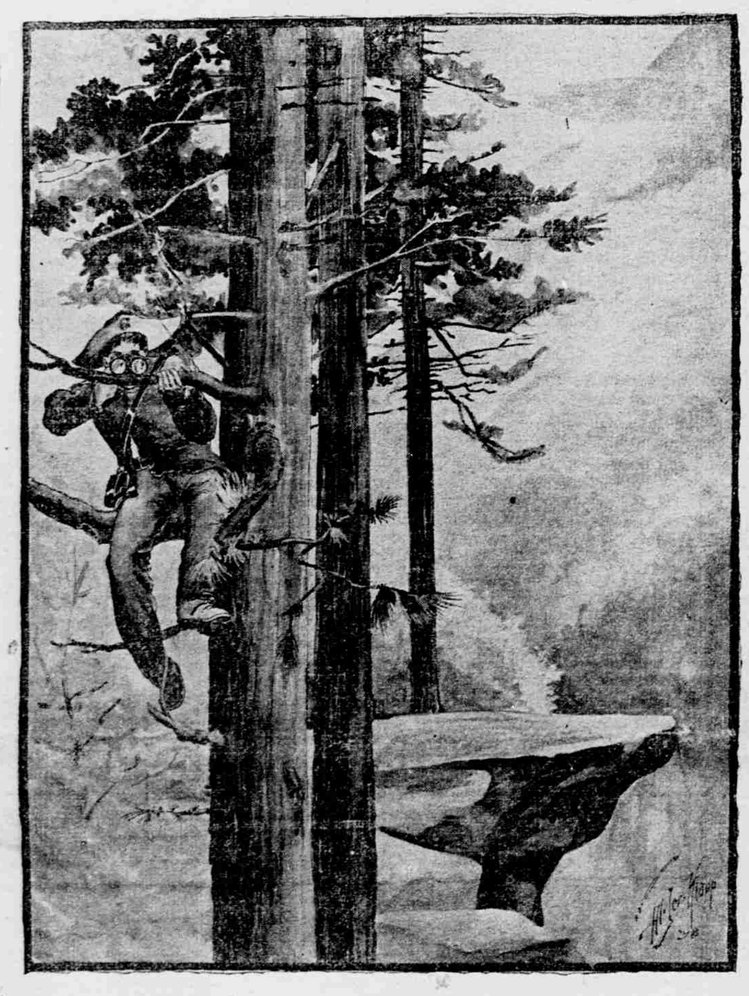
"Yes, he talks and writes it; but he has got to hate the very name of the nation. Some English sharper cheated him out of every cent he had in the world, and it seems the courts refused to help him."

AT A SIGNAL-POST.

We started at daybreak the next morning, and after an hour's climb my guide brought us to the crest of a ridge, where we found Lieut. Estevan toasting his breakfast at a pine-knot fire. "This is one of their signal-posts," explained the guide; "the Lieutenant has been here after messages since the day before yesterday. They can't risk to exchange signals till the coast is quite clear."

"That's one good thing about Cuba, isn't it? You can pick your own climate," observed the Lieutenant. "Last night a North Yankee would have felt quite at home up here; at one time I did think I had frozen one of my hind feet."

"Yes; even the vegetation looks North American," I replied; "just look at all those oaks and pine trees. All our Northern field crops would thrive at this altitude."



"He Ranged His Field-glass from a Fork of Its Top Branch."

"Then please don't give the secret away," laughed the Lieutenant, "or your countrymen will skin us out of the last acre of ground. They will whine and howl hymns for awhile—'Hold the Fort, for I am coming,' and all that, and then come it strong, sure enough."

"Oh, talk Christian," grumbled the guide, suspecting some profanity.

"He wants to get on your stadholder's list of good citizens, doesn't he?" chuckled the scoffer, poking my ribs; "but better let's start out; it's nearly eight miles to our best hunting-grounds."

The vegetation of mountain-hights is really the same the world over. We waded through huckleberry patches and saw copses of chincapins and elder bushes, and here and there amongst the bowlders of the sierra brooks flowering rhododendrons indistinguishable from those of the Tennessee highlands. Big lizards scampered across the trail now and then, but not more frequently than the squirrels of the Southern Alleghanies, and only the shriek of the mountain parrots and the weird, moaning call-note of the West Indian hornbill broke the spell of home reveries.

At about 9 a. m. we made a halt on a promontory that afforded a marvellous view of the Sierra Maestra, the great coast-range of southeastern Cuba, where the highlands of the West Indian archipelago seem to attain their maximum elevation. The estimates of that maximum differ, but judging from analogies I could not help suspecting that some of the peaks now in sight must exceed the hight of Mt. Mitchell by at least 2,000 feet.

The summits of the Sierra de San Tomas, west of Bayamo, could likewise be distinguished above the wooded crests of the river hills; but my companion was anxious to ascertain the meaning of a campfire smoke much nearer by, and after clambering about the rock in all directions, at last scaled a tree and ranged his fieldglass from a fork of its top branches.

"It's those Pelados; those cursed moss-troopers," said he, when he came down, rubbing his shins. "They are hiding in our foothills, and will soon have a fuss with our scouts if we do not move them out. That's just what Serg't Garcia expected when he persuaded us to take that Matanzas bugler along. Have you got your tooting-tin handy, Robledo?"

"Yes, sir; shall I try a blast?" asked a chucklebeaded native whom I had often heard imitating Spanish bugle-signals on an old hunting-horn.

"Yes; but wait a minute till we get out of this gap," said the Lieutenant. "Those apes are pretty good at tree-climbing themselves, and might get a glimpse of us. Now toot away," said he, when we reached the thicket of the next sierra brook.

A "BLUFF-GAME."

The bugler made his way through the bushes to the brink of the western declivity, and then waked the mountain echoes with a staccato of shrill blasts, a "rally on the center skirmishers," in the approved style of the Spanish cavalry trumpeters. Then, clambering some 300 yards down the slope, he repeated his assembly-call, shriller than before, and 10 minutes later we could plainly hear the stampede of the alarmed Pelados. The inexpensive stratagem had answered its purpose, and the moss-troopers had departed under the impression that the Spanish rangers were on their track and approaching at a perilous rate of speed.

"There's birds in that thicket ahead there," said Serg't Castro, who had picked our trail since we left the lookout cliff; "they must be grouse or pheasant, by the way they are scratching."

"Go easy, then," said the Lieutenant; "they may give us a chance, if they do not skip out too quick."

I had got my rifle ready, and crouching behind a stump at first sight of our game, fired three shots at a string of bush-pheasants that filed across the road some 60 yards ahead of us. The first bird flopped about sprawling, but regained its legs and ran out of sight, the second dropped in the trail and the third [illegible] off in a spurt, though my bullet had knocked a cloud of feathers out of his jacket.

"There! just as I told you! he beats Pacheco shooting; but not for luck," said the Sergeant. "I saw Old Long-legs shoot at three bush-cocks, just like that, and bag two of them, though one of his bullets missed a yard and a half."

"Who's Pacheco?" I asked; "my horse-hunter, you mean?"

"Yes, the cook's pothunter, Old Privileges," said the Lieutenant; "you can't beat his luck at all; there seems to be game wherever he goes—unless he finds it by scent, like a bird-dog."

Half a mile farther south, Lieut. Estevan dropped a rabbit at the first shot, and I had begun to flatter myself with the hope that our Mausers would not have a clear miss against their score that day, when my own rifle wasted a cartridge upon a mountain-eagle. I would have staked my salvation that the bullet must have pierced his body from end to end, but in the thick foliage of the treetops we did not see a feather drop, and Don Aguila certainly continued his flight as if nothing had happened.

"They are as tough as sharks," said the Lieutenant, to smooth my ruffled feelings; "you can't kill a rascal of that sort unless you shoot his head off. We caught one in a trap a year ago, and it took us a quarter of an hour to whack its dozen lives out of it."

"Yes, and they say those three-mile rifles are better at hitting than at killing," remarked the guide.

There is certainly an impression to that effect, but its chief basis, I believe, is the experience of hospital surgeons, who have less trouble with a clean perforation than with a deeply-imbedded and probe-eluding old-fashioned musket-ball. A modern rifle-bullet, on the other hand, may fatally injure three men standing side by side; and the difference might be summed up in the conclusion that a Mauser projectile will do more immediate execution, while a flint-lock ball is more formidable in its after-effects.

A CHARACTERISTIC SCENE.

A depopulated village is a melancholy sight to human, or, at least, to humane, eyes; but how is it that there is always something attractive about a deserted homestead in the solitude of a primitive wilderness? I have seen scores of tenantless ranchos in the mountains of eastern Cuba, and could never leave them without a sigh of regret.

The desire to dismount and "jump the claim," as our Western miners would express it, is apt to get the better of all emotions of sympathy with the fate of the former owner.

That hankering for usurpation came strong upon me when the windings of a highland glen brought us in sight of a clearing with a deserted dwelling-house and neglected garden on a midway terrace of the Sierra Vasteca. There were no other clearings in that part of the mountains, and in a land of peace the owners could have enjoyed all the fun of a family picnic in paradise.

"They were arrested about the middle of last June," said the Lieutenant, "and it was a case of what you might call suffering shipwreck in sight of the harbor. The proprietor had contrived to keep on good terms with both parties through all those years of trouble, and then had to go under just as luck seemed about to verify his prediction that his countrymen or some other outsider would take a hand in the game."

"Was he an American?" I inquired.

"No, an Irishman from Nueva Sota," said the guide; "his name was Esmar, or something of that sort; a great heretic, I understood."

Spanish nomenclature is somewhat vague in dealing with foreign proper names. "Nueva Sota" might stand for Nova Scotia or New York, and the heretic might have been a relative of Robert Elsmere, though the Lieutenant had an impression that his right name was Smart. One of my Bayamo neighbors went by a name as saintly-Spanish as anything in the Salamanca Almanac, and it took me a year to find out that "San Letono" was a metamorphosis of Singleton.

Mr. "Esmar" had been a registrado, or Government protege. The compulsory removal of the farming population had never been as thorough as our American newspapers used to represent it. Thousands of ranchers were suffered to remain on farms close enough to garrison towns to obviate the risk of treasonable transactions, and hundreds of others were left unmolested because they had been able to procure a certificate of loyalty.

FATE OF A REGISTRADO.

In out-of-the-way districts these loyalists had often a hard time trying to keep their balance between Satan and the sea-monsters. Excess of loyalty might arouse the wrath of the insurgents, while concessions to the blackmail collectors of the next bushwhacker camp were liable to be reported by the omnipresent Spanish spies.

Mr. Smart had tried in vain to steer a safe middle course. After having been under surveillance of the Spanish scouts for a couple of months, he was at last arrested on a charge of "aiding traitors," and dragged to Nuevitas, while his wife and children were reconcentrated in Santiago, their doom being in either case equivalent to a sentence of death.

"Orejon de manzanas a dos pesetas per aroba," said a signboard on a rickety post of the orchard gate (dried apples for sale at 40 cents a bushel).

But fruit had become cheaper at Mr. Esmar's ranch. Hogs, rats and Pelados had helped themselves at will all through the Summer, and the trees were alive with a rascally kind of steel-blue crows that have a keen sent for orchard products.

"There were about 200 fourfooters of one sort or other belonging to this farm," said the guide, "but they are badly scattered now, and would all be dead if the moss-troopers could afford to hunt with powder and lead. They have clubbed the souls out of the sheep, but the goats were too smart for them, and

(Continued on third page.)

"I Looked Around and Found Myself Alone."

INSIDE OF REBELDOM

Life of a Private in the Confederate Army

BY DR. J. P. CANNON, Co. C, 27th Ala.

EDITORIAL NOTE.

Dr. Cannon, who was a young Alabama boy when the civil war broke out, entered the rebel army not long previous to the battles of Forts Henry and Donelson. His father had been a Union man up to the time of secession, when he considered it his duty to go out with his State. His story gives true pictures of the life of the private soldiers of rebeldom. Dr. Cannon's quaint way of telling humorous episodes, in which he does not spare himself, his occasional stirring pathos, and blunt, forceful manner of describing moving scenes of the battlefield, must stamp his story as one of the best from the view of the private soldier that has been written.

He has narrated in lively style the raising of the 27th Ala., and the great things its members expected to accomplish in repelling the Northern invaders, their disappointment at the result at Forts Henry and Donelson, the return home, and the march to Shiloh too late to be of service. Dr. Cannon and others of his regiment became members of the 45th Miss., and started on the Kentucky campaign. His narrative of further events promises our readers excellent entertainment.

As I am not writing history, I will not impose upon the readers of THE NATIONAL TRIBUNE anything more than a few reminiscences of the Kentucky campaign, in which the two Alabama companies and 45th Miss. and I figured. We crossed the Tennessee on Aug. 31, 1862, carrying no tents, bivouacking anywhere we could stop long enough to procure a few hours' sleep, considering ourselves lucky if it happened to be in the timber, where we could have the shelter of a tree; nor were we much burdened with other baggage, as the Confederacy could not furnish us clothing and blankets, and we had been cut off from home so long that what we had was about worn out. In short, we started out in "light marching order," and held our own in respect throughout the campaign.

The march through Tennessee was without hindrance, except that we halted one day in Sequatchie Valley to give time for the artillery and wagon-train, which was a long one, to cross the mountains. While here our company was detailed to picket a road on the side of the mountain about two miles from camp, with special orders to prevent any whisky or brandy being brought into camps.

It was quiet enough in the early part of the night, but about midnight two fellows came riding in on wagon mules they had "borrowed" from a teamster. When halted they said they had been out foraging, and their wagon had broken down and they were returning to camps for repairs. One carried a jug and the other had more than his share of canteens, which looked suspicious, and on examination they were found to contain apple brandy instead of buttermilk, as they protested.

Our orders were positive, and we had to arrest them, but were not as honest as "Si and Shorty" when they arrested the smugglers in Middle Tennessee and broke the bottles. Instead, we proceeded to destroy the brandy in a different way, assisted by the prisoners, who took the matter good naturedly, and seemed willing to divide.

In a short time we heard coming from the same direction more who evidently had been imbibing pretty freely, judging from the noise they made yelling, laughing and singing merry songs. They ran right into our trap, entirely oblivious of danger lurking in front, and very much surprised, as they had passed out on the same road before we were posted. They, too, were loaded down with canteens all filled with apple brandy; and from that time the boys were coming in at intervals the remainder of the night.

HERE WAS "A STATE OF THINGS."

By daylight we had as many prisoners as we could manage—prisoners, captors, officers and privates, all in different stages of intoxication—some drunk, while others were only just a little "boozy," myself among the latter class. Having never been accustomed to drinking anything intoxicating, I touched it very lightly, for it was not at all pleasant to the taste; but, to do as the rest did, I gulped it down like medicine and excused myself on the plea of "war times."

When we reached camps the rear of the army was just moving out, our division having been gone at least two hours. Some of the boys were then too drunk to travel, and pitching them into wagons which had not got started, we followed on overtaking the command about noon, when we were all placed under arrest and ordered to march in rear of the regiment.

We found to our disgust that the other Alabama company also was under arrest for stealing "roasting-ears" the day before. The Mississippians had great fun at our expense, and tantalized the "Yallerhammers," as they called us, to an unmerciful degree.

After three days the privates of both companies were released, but the commissioned officers were held under arrest until the 8th of October, when they were released to participate in the battle of Perryville.

We crossed the Cumberland River (by wading) 60 miles above Nashville, and reached Glasgow, Ky., about Sept. 10, where Gen. Bragg issued a proclamation, calling on the Kentuckians to rally to his standard. He had been assured by citizens of the State that they would join the Confederacy if an opportunity was presented, and this was one of the objects of the invasion. Leaving Glasgow we struck the Louisville & Nashville R. R. at Cave City in advance of Gen. Buell, who followed from Nashville.

At Mumfordville we thought we had "struck a snag" when we were drawn up around the fort, where we could look into the muzzles of frowning guns and see the glistening bayonets of the infantry in the ditches, expecting every moment for the order to charge. We knew it would be a bloody affair if we had to take the fort by assault, although we largely outnumbered the enemy; but the afternoon passed without orders, and we slept on our arms, dreading the light of day.

We were greatly relieved when morning revealed the white flag flying, and the prisoners, 4,000 or 5,000 in number, were marched out for our inspection. Besides the prisoners we got a quantity of arms, ammunition, and other stores, which we needed; the most important part of the capture, to us privates, being the hardtack and bacon, which we were in fine condition to handle satisfactorily to ourselves.